

Description: This is a relatively easy 7 mile circuit. There are a few steep hills and several stream crossings however, the hills are short and most of the stream crossings are narrow. This is a good winter hike or a trek when you need to stay close to home but just need to get out in the woods for a while. The highlights are the falls at Raven Rocks, a popular lunch spot, and the hardly visible ruins of the gunpowder mills on Panther Branch.

The hike starts with and ends with an unofficial trail, both shown to me by Jack Weiss of the Greater Baltimore Sierra Club many years ago, so make sure you bring the accompanying map and directions with you. The Park Service sells good topo maps of the park but they won't show these adlib routes.

Directions from I-83 at the intersection with Mount Carmel Road:

1. Exit onto Mount Carmel Road.
2. Travel east on Mt. Carmel (Yield right coming off of I-83 North. Turn left if coming from I-83 South.).
3. Travel to the intersection of York Road.
4. Turn left on York Road.
5. Pass Hereford High School on the right. Turn left onto Bunker Hill Road.
6. Drive under I-83 and pass Collett Dr. on the right. Park on either shoulder of Bunker Hill Rd. near the gate for the Gunpowder Archery Club.

Trail Notes: Walk back to Collett Dr. and turn left onto it. Pass a few homes on the left and then walk around a barrier. Judging by the railroad ties on the side of the old road and the derelict BTC Street Car you pass on the way, I suspect this used to be the end of the line that at one time ran into the center of Baltimore. As you descend, the road will bend to the left leaving the sounds of I-83 and a nice meadow on the right. Hawks can be spotted in the surrounding trees at times as they search the meadow for their next meal.

Pass the remains of an old farm on the left. Several foundations can be seen. The most obvious is an old silo. Climb a short hill and enter a pine plantation. Faint blue blazes remain on a couple of the trees suggesting that this was once an official park trail. At the end of the pine plantation the most worn trail bears to the right (east) to join up with the Gunpowder South Trail. To walk along more of the river bear to the left here (west). The trail is pretty faint if you can find it at all. Just walk down the hill through open woods, keeping towards the center of the hill as you descend. You'll notice that the hill is getting narrower. The old trail should soon become apparent.

Arrive at an old amphitheater with wooden seats not far from the river (1.28 miles from the start). Turn right onto white blazed Gunpowder South Trail. Watch the blazes. In a while the trail will split. The old trail will continue to follow the river. If you take this route you will be compelled to negotiate some serious blow downs and a blowout of the river bank. Instead take the right fork up the side of the hill, descending just before I-83.

Walk under I-83 and soon arrive at York Road (0.86 miles from the amphitheatre). Turn left, cross the bridge and turn right onto blue blazed Gunpowder North Trail. In about 0.8 miles reach scenic Raven Rocks, a great lunch spot. In the early spring, Star of Bethlehem flowers bloom along its edges.

Continue along Gunpowder North Trail, ascending and descending the only 2 major hills on the trip. They are steep but very short. At one mile after leaving Raven Rocks the trail ends at a gravel drive. Turn right and follow it out to Falls Road (0.33 miles from the trail end).

Turn right on Falls Road, cross the bridge and turn right again, back onto white blazed Gunpowder South Trail. In 0.54 miles reach the junction with pink (?) blazed Panther Branch Trail. There is no sign but the trail is obvious. There are 2 places where you can cross Panther Branch. There is a narrow rock hop closer to the trail junction and a wide "splash" crossing a little farther up stream. Pick one!

Continue up Panther Branch. Watch for old stonework on the hill on your right with breaks in it. Behind it used to be the millrace for the gunpowder mills. At the fork in the stream the trail and blazes goes right. From here you can look downstream and get a better view of the millrace. Where you are standing probably used to be a dammed pond.

Shortly after bearing right look for an obvious trail that crosses the right fork. Cross here, leaving Panther Branch Trail but still following Panther Branch. You'll soon pass the ruins of an old hearth on the right. I think this was used to make charcoal which was used in the production of gun powder in the mills.

You'll cross Panther Branch about 4 more times, most of these are easy rock hops but be careful. The most innocent little rock can be quite slippery and very quickly deposit one on his/her bottom.

After leaving the official Panther Branch Trail you want to keep an eye out on the ridge to the right. Where the top is flat and open happens to be the edge of Hereford High School's Athletic fields. On the stream, just above this feature, you'll make your last crossing. You should be able to pick up a trail that follows a trough up the back of the hill and very quickly deposits you onto a nice pine needle, wide road which ends at the edge of the school property. From here, turn right and follow the baseball field. At a break in the fence follow the third base line to the south side of the school. (There is fencing blocking your progress on the north side.) From there follow York Road and Bunker Hill Road back to your car.